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Book Reviews

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Putin's War on Ukraine: Russia's Campaign for Global Counter-Revolution

by Samuel Ramani

Reviewed by Dr. Lionel M. Beehner, senior Russia analyst, Foreign Military Studies Office, and senior editorial director, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs

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Samuel Ramani deserves praise for tackling the complex and fast-moving target of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War in his well-researched tour de force, *Putin's War on Ukraine*. His book details tactical and operational military decisions, even though Ramani is a professor of politics and international relations, not a military historian. He relies heavily on primary and secondary sources from local press, social media apps like Telegram, Russia's pro-Kremlin punditry, and his extensive interviews with experts. I appreciated his attempt to capture the confusion in Moscow ahead of the February 2022 Ukraine invasion and his blow-by-blow account of the war's opening phase, revealing the ugliness of the war effort and why it faltered. For wonks who follow the war closely, the book might feel like familiar terrain, but its insightful analysis and colorful quotes make it a must-read for diplomats and defense experts.



The book's central argument describes why Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Spoiler alert: it was not fear of NATO encirclement but of regime change and popular revolution from within. What motivated the Kremlin is what Ramani calls "counter-revolution." Anything with a whiff of revolutionary fervor is anathema to Vladimir Putin's brand of authoritarianism.

Ramani then gives readers a front-row seat to the war. Military historians should skip to chapter 4, which provides an intriguing overview of the botched battle of Kyiv and should be required reading at war colleges. The book decently details the Russian military's operational blunders and strategic setbacks throughout 2022. Ramani points to the Russian armed forces' "hierarchical rigidity," a legacy of its Soviet predecessor (129). Followers of Ukraine will appreciate how the author recalls incidents that may be buried in readers' memories. For example, I had largely forgotten about the fusillade of cyberattacks Russia carried out against Ukraine in the years before 2022.

Ramani also reminds readers how Europe nearly escalated the war beyond Ukraine. On February 27, 2022, Putin ordered his military to place its strategic nuclear forces on a “special mode of combat duty” (117). Calling the move an “unacceptable escalation,” the United States and its NATO Allies ramped up arms shipments to Ukraine (117). Early on, the United States and NATO feared Russia would target supply nodes in Poland and Romania, and Russia’s deputy foreign minister called such depots “legitimate targets,” raising the real risk of a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia (117). Another Russian defense analyst called the NATO-supplied weapons “additional trophies that will fall into our hands and will be used against their former owners” (117).

Remarkably, NATO called Russia’s bluff. No shipments were targeted on NATO soil. No advanced weapons ended up as “trophies” in Russia’s hands. The war was a romp in the beginning, but in ways Western analysts failed to predict. Too bad Ramani did not take to task those experts who overhyped Russia’s military prowess and modernization efforts.

Still, I got misty-eyed rereading about those halcyon early days of the war when all the breaks were going Ukraine’s way. Ukrainian intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance allowed snipers to pick off senior Russian commanders one by one. Ditto reading again about the sinking of the *Moskva*—the first time a Russian flagship had been sunk since the 1905 Russo-Japanese War—which dealt a symbolic blow to Russia’s naval capabilities. Ukraine’s anti-ship weapons, with help from radar targeting supplied by its Bayraktar TB2 drones, pushed Russia’s famed Black Sea fleet further offshore, reducing its anti-aircraft cover. Even the Russian saboteurs sent to assassinate Volodymyr Zelensky and “create ‘maximum panic’” in the capital could pull off neither (135).

I had to chuckle at the Chechen paramilitaries, known as Kadyrovtsy, sent to conquer Kyiv, whose poor military discipline earned them a bruising moniker, the “Tiktok [sic] Army” (132). Ramani reaffirms the importance of the Black Sea fleet to Russia’s planned conquest of Ukraine and the seizing of Mariupol to create Russia’s land bridge to Crimea. He reminds readers of the iconic images of the Russian convoy beset by fuel and food shortages, which became a sitting duck for Ukraine’s Bayraktar drones and Javelin missiles. The war’s initial phase, to paraphrase the title of Gordon M. Goldstein’s popular 2008 book about another botched war, was a “lesson in disaster.”

Russia soon rebounded. The Kremlin appeared to downsize its military objective, moving from demilitarizing (and “denazify[ing]”) Ukraine to a Donbas-centric campaign confined mostly to the east (121ff). The war’s next phase saw the usual nuclear saber-rattling, a ramping up of what Russians refer to as NATO’s “total hybrid war,” and a repression of so-called “fifth columns” within Russia

as dissent was put down internally (152). The country was no longer mobilized for a “special military operation” but for war (178). More than 300,000 Russians—mostly poor young men from the provinces—were hurriedly rounded up, trained, and sent to the front line. Many never returned home.

The book masterfully shows the chaos within Russian leadership circles near the invasion. Only a handful of Russian leaders were privy to these plans, which led to logistical failures (for example, not taking any cold-weather gear into battle). The “military’s bureaucratic nature and culture of risk aversion” reflected Russia’s struggles with a multidimensional war (129). I only wish the book delved more into the Ukrainian armed forces’ culture, doctrine, and civil-military frictions.

The Kremlin’s information operations were ham-fisted (though strangely more effective in the Global South). For example, after the Bucha massacre, Russian propagandists accused the United Kingdom of staging the killings because “Bucha” sounds like “butcher” in British English (167). After Russia’s April 2022 bombing of the Kramatorsk railway station, media surrogates in Moscow alleged the Tochka-U missiles that destroyed the terminal were obsolete—but months earlier, Channel One Russia had praised local pro-Russia militias for having Tochka-U missiles (and noted Russia’s 8th Combined Arms Army possessed them, too). Its information operations were always clumsy, half-empty gestures teeming with contradictions.

The main value of Ramani’s book is the contextualization of Russia’s foggy rationale for the war. The Kremlin claimed it invaded to “denazify” Ukraine (121). Never mind that the Z symbol of pro-war Russians bore an uncanny resemblance to the Station Z gas chamber at Nazi Germany’s Sachsenhausen concentration camp (144). Without justifying the claim, Ramani likens it to “Ukrainian Russophobia,” “denigration of the legacy of the Soviet Union’s triumph in the Second World War,” or “pro-Europeanism”—though newscasters in Russia frequently point out all the supposed Nazis within Ukraine’s rank and file (125, 172). The “special military operation” was popular among everyday Russians, perhaps partly driven by the latent ethnic nationalism pervading their society. Putin is probably a centrist in this regard, if one compares his statements to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s. Even Aleksey Navalny, Putin’s opposition candidate who died in prison, once said, “I don’t see any difference at all between Russians and Ukrainians” (21).

One quibble with the book is the semantic confusion around its subtitle and central thesis that Russia is on a quest for “global counter-revolution” (12). In international relations, we equate revolutionary regimes like those in China, Iran, and North Korea with revisionist powers. Applying this rigid definition to Russia, however, would misidentify it as a status quo power (and the abovementioned revolutionary

regimes are its allies in upending the current global order). Ramani's use of "counter-revolution" presumably refers to the Kremlin's suspicion of foreign-backed regime changes from below or Western-led hybrid war tactics, which can be lumped together as "color revolutions" (305n1). The war in Ukraine is thus a manifestation of Russian support for counterrevolution there.

Ramani further acknowledges that "Putin's counter-revolutionary agenda stemmed from his desire to reassert Russia's hegemony over Ukraine and promote his brand of illiberalism within the post-Soviet space" (8). This illiberalism is a means to maintaining Russia's great-power status and challenging the US-led rules-based liberal order. Moreover, Ramani's argument implies the *casus belli* the Russian elite and American scholars like John J. Mearsheimer mentioned are demonstrably false. Domestic factors motivate Putin—specifically, he wants to unite Russians around a set of common values to secure his power. In this regard, "counter-revolution" can become a catchall term for anything anti-Russia. In this interpretation, even Imre Nagy would be considered a "fascist" and "Hitlerite" (11). Ramani labels most Russian interventionism abroad "counter-revolutionary"—whether discussing Wagner mercenaries sent to Sudan in 2018 or air support to Syria in 2015. This categorization ignores many other dynamics at play. Many of the places where Russia intervenes are security vacuums, meaning what might be interpreted as counterrevolutionary behavior is just naked opportunism. It is unclear whether Russia had its eyes on Crimea before the opportunity to take it back presented itself in 2014.

My only other gripe is Ramani should have synthesized his main evidence and arguments in his final chapter instead of providing a detailed rundown of the war's second year. His second-to-last page details the minutia of prisoner exchanges rather than identifying wider gaps in our knowledge of war onsets or termination to suggest future avenues of scholarship. The final chapter ("Conclusion") has the unfortunate subtitle "Russia in 2023: A Year of Implosion?" Yevgeny Prigozhin (who died in August 2023) features prominently in the book's final pages. Ramani prophesizes too much about Russia's imminent collapse with statements like "[Russia] is veering on the precipice of an economic and political crisis heading into 2023" (400). He simply runs out of runway.

More comprehensive books about the Russia-Ukraine War will come once government documents are declassified and defectors write memoirs. Based on the limited open sources we have, books like this one are invaluable for interpreting Putin's thinking beyond his rambling statements, opinion essays, or interviews with Tucker Carlson.

It is Kremlinology 2.0. We need more books like this one to make sense of this senseless war.

London: Hurst, 2023 • 584 pages • \$29.95

Keywords: Vladimir Putin, Russia-Ukraine War, counterrevolution, information operations, NATO

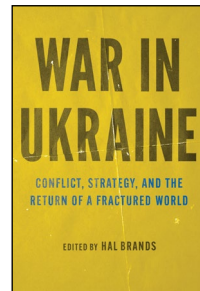
War in Ukraine: Conflict, Strategy, and the Return of a Fractured World

edited by Hal Brands

Reviewed by John C. Erickson, senior engineer, Axiom Technologies,
and Dr. John A. Nagl, professor of war-fighting studies, US Army War College

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 initiated the biggest war in Europe since World War II. Increasingly, scholars of conflict are comparing Russia's unjust and unprovoked invasion of its neighbor to the joint Russian and German invasions of Poland in September 1939 that, in most historians' eyes, marked the beginning of World War II. In April 2024, George F. Will wrote in the *Washington Post*, "We can see now that the great unraveling that was World War II perhaps began with Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria. Without the benefit of retrospection, we cannot be certain that World War III has not begun" (George F. Will, "So, 112 Ignoble, Infantile Republicans Voted to Endanger Civilization," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/04/24/ignoble-house-republicans-against-ukraine-aid/>). The next month, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R) of Texas stated what keeps him up at night is "World War Three. It would be an unholy alliance between Russia, China, Iran, [and] North Korea, threatening both Europe and the Pacific" (Rhonda Colvin, "What's Next for Congress on the World Front," *Washington Post* (online), May 3, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/05/03/michael-mccaul-ukraine-israel-congress-republicans/>). McCaul does not think there has been an environment this ready to combust since World War II.



In this time of global crisis, Johns Hopkins scholar Hal Brands's *War in Ukraine* provides a scholarly appraisal of the Russian invasion of Ukraine that may mark the first blows of World War III. Unusually, the book is available as a free download from Project MUSE; readers should take the time to download and review it. Brands emphasizes the importance of this conflict, arguing that “[i]ts outcome—whatever that outcome is—will profoundly influence the international balance of power, the struggles between democracies and autocracies, the alignment of countries on multiple continents, and the rules that govern global affairs” (1). The book’s purpose is to help “policymakers and analysts make sense of—and react intelligently to—world-shifting events as they occur” (2).

Part 1, “Origins and Overviews,” tackles causal factors for the war by interacting with neorealist interpretations, specifically those put forth by University of Chicago Professor John J. Mearsheimer, an apologist for Russia. Contributors Michael McFaul and Robert Person critique Mearsheimer’s analysis that NATO expansion was the principal cause of the war, arguing instead that “antagonism between Russia and the West—including over NATO—was a *variable*, not a growing constant, one whose variation bears little temporal relation to Russia’s hostile actions toward Ukraine” (48). Anne Applebaum’s chapter, “How the War Will End,” similarly critiques Mearsheimer by grouping him with MIT Professor Emeritus Noam Chomsky in the “‘America is at fault’ clique” (88). In contrast, Applebaum finds that Russia has wanted to incorporate Ukraine into its orbit through any means necessary: “The Russians want to show they can bring back, with impunity, cruel forms of repression and occupation familiar to historians of the 20th century” (89).

Part 2: “The Conflict,” emphasizes aspects of America’s strategy in Ukraine and the ongoing battlefield dynamics. Michael Kofman’s chapter discusses pertinent battlefield dynamics; he analyzes the war by phase, geographical considerations, Russian strengths and weaknesses, and technological factors. Thomas Mahnken and Joshua Baker highlight prewar fallacies in strategic thought:

In the months leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there was plenty of wishful thinking that such a war would be irrational. . . . Contrary to such wishful thinking, Putin saw the use of force against Ukraine as a rational option. He made it clear in public statements long before launching the war that he saw Ukraine’s statehood as illegitimate and claimed that Ukraine was an integral part of Russia (188).

Part 3: “Global Dimensions and Implications,” analyzes the post–Cold War international order, Russia’s future, Chinese assessments of the war, and America’s global role. Ashley Tellis states:

The ideational gulf between Russian realpolitik and Western liberalism regarding international order is thus quite stark. . . . This view is not Putin’s alone. Many countries outside of the liberal West believe that the Ukraine crisis cannot be properly judged, politically and morally, without admitting to the inadvertent consequences of the West’s desire to expand the pacific federation in Europe (210).

Chapter 14 may be of utmost importance to the Intelligence Community and senior defense officials. Bonny Lin and Brian Hart deep dive into Beijing’s assessment of the Russian invasion and Western response: “There is now consensus among Chinese scholars that the Ukraine conflict has uprooted the global order, resulting in uncertainty and a new contest for power that is reshaping the international landscape” (240).

The last chapter concludes with Peter Feaver and William Inboden’s assessment of America’s role in the world after the Russian invasion. They conclude that an “emerging coalition of tyrannies” forces America to realize that, “[a]s costly and challenging as internationalism can be, it also remains the least-bad option, grounded in the lessons of history. If the defenders of the rules-based global system prevail in Ukraine, the prospects for the American-led internationalism will improve—and that is far better for US interests and security than the alternative” (301).

War in Ukraine asks big questions about the emerging world order that has surfaced since Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine. It is a penetrating analysis of what changed in world leaders’ minds to enable the possibility of war and what the future of the international order might be and ought to be. War college students, policymakers, and national defense leaders should conduct a deliberate read of this indispensable resource for navigating the complexities of a turning point in the post–Cold War order—and perhaps of the opening days of World War III.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024 • 328 pages • Free download available from Project MUSE
at <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/122782>

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, international relations, political theory, post–Cold War, NATO

STRATEGY

Unwinnable Wars: Afghanistan and the Future of American Armed Statebuilding

by Adam Wunische

Reviewed by Dr. Erik Goepner, US government analyst, colonel (US Air Force, retired)

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Adam Wunische's new monograph, *Unwinnable Wars: Afghanistan and the Future of American Armed Statebuilding* provides military leaders and the elected officials to whom they report a timeless reminder—American power has limits. Wunische offers a critical analysis of the challenges and limitations the United States faced in armed state-building efforts, using the case of Afghanistan as a focal point. The book argues that preexisting conditions beyond the control of the intervening power often foreordain the failure of such missions.



Wunische identifies four major preexisting conditions that severely limit the success of armed state-building efforts:

- Rough terrain, like mountain ranges, provides safe places for insurgents.
- Ethnic divisions inhibit democracy building and increase the likelihood of conflict.
- Resentment from the local population erodes legitimacy
- Economic deprivation makes the building of critical social and industrial conditions much harder.

Beyond these preexisting conditions, Wunische highlights several other factors that further constrain positive outcomes. First, temporal incentives that pressure the intervening state to leave quickly can encourage local leaders to prolong the intervention. Next, an intervening military faces the dilemma of taking on an atypical mission for which it does not normally train while maintaining readiness for near-peer conflicts. Finally, the armed forces must consider the unintended consequences of aid and development programs, which include creating dependencies that undermine the goal of creating sustainable governance.

Readers will find themselves nodding in agreement as they survey Wunische's arguments, particularly when examining recent American efforts in Afghanistan. He admirably explores the policy implications of his arguments by developing a framework that policymakers can use to evaluate potential intervention strategies and probabilities of success and then applies that framework to potential interventions involving America's near-peer competitors, such as China-Taiwan and Russia-Ukraine scenarios.

Unwinnable Wars could have benefited from a more nuanced treatment of the preexisting conditions foundational to Wunische's thesis. Much of the evidence for the preexisting conditions comes from the civil war and insurgency literature, despite the definition of armed state building referring more broadly to war and hostilities. For example, though the book identifies ethnic fragmentation as one of the most consequential preexisting conditions affecting armed state building, as Nicholas Sambanis found in his review of quantitative studies on civil war, "ethnic diversity is not linked to a higher risk of civil violence, but may in fact reduce that risk" ("A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Quantitative Literature on Civil War," *Defence and Peace Economics* 13, no. 3 [2002]: 230).

Additionally, *Unwinnable Wars* largely ignores the role of weak democracies in state failure, as compared to the dramatically reduced risk of state failure found in closed autocracies and strong democracies. Considering the impact of government type could be particularly important, as American armed state-building efforts often introduce democratic forms of government in nations that have little familiarity with such systems. *Unwinnable Wars* offers a persuasive argument about the perils of armed state building. It provides a solid foundation for future research on the topic and raises important points about the limits of American power and the challenges to successful armed state building.

Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2024 • 224 pages • \$69.95

Keywords: military intervention, armed state building, policy making, international relations, Afghanistan

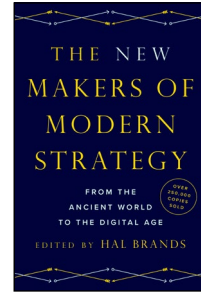
The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age

edited by Hal Brands

Reviewed by John C. Erickson, senior engineer, Axiom Technologies,
and John A. Nagl, professor of war-fighting studies, US Army War College

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When the first edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy* was published in 1943, an America just finding its footing as the world's most powerful nation faced the twin threats of Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan. The authors of that notable collection of essays, whom the estimable Edward Mead Earle gathered together, drew upon the long history of strategic thought to find a path to victory in the global struggle in which the United States was engaged.



The second edition was published in 1986, near the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. This time, under its editor, Peter Paret, the book explicitly described its goal in its subtitle: examining strategy From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (the latter of which the first edition clearly could not have covered).

Keeping with the tradition of publishing a new volume about every four decades, Hal Brands has brought forth a third edition that goes back further and reaches forward to a present in which the United States does not have a clearly defined enemy as it did during earlier iterations.

This is only one factor making this third edition the most interesting yet. While the authors in the first two volumes were overwhelmingly British and American males, the third volume reaches far more widely in the topics it covers and in the authors' lived experiences. The combination of academic rigor, historical analysis, and concluding questions each essay poses makes this edition especially valuable.

These exceptional essays touch upon different time periods and aspects of military and national or grand strategy. Particularly good essays include US Army War College Professor Emerita Tami Biddle's on Allied grand strategy in World War II and the Editor in Chief of *Parameters* Antulio J. Echevarria II's on Henri Jomini. Seth Jones's fascinating analysis of irregular warfare as practiced by state actors focuses on what may be the most likely challenge for America and her allies. Jones notes, "For Russia, Iran, and even China, choosing to fight a conventional or nuclear war with the United States would be a risky and

dangerous proposition indeed,” and that “the United States and other Western countries are vulnerable to irregular methods” (1,021).

In another important essay, Joshua Rovner describes how new war-fighting domains bring about new strategies and outlines the three-fold historical pattern that invariably follows. Initially, hopes are high as new war-fighting domains emerge. Then comes fear as questions are raised about what adversaries can do in those new domains and as they adapt their strategies to counter ours. Last is the acceptance of limitations as technological and adversarial setbacks occur during conflict. Rovner raises questions about the emergence of potential manmade domains beyond cyber, space, and artificial intelligence. He notes: “Forty years ago few predicted the growth of the internet. Twenty years ago, few could have predicted the nature of social media today. A similarly unexpected change will force observers to reconsider their understanding of cyberspace, and the strategic implications that follow” (1,091).

John Lewis Gaddis’s fitting and comprehensive capstone essay to this volume discusses national and grand strategy. Gaddis blends insights into Clausewitzian ideas with domestic and ecological factors to assess what makes grand strategy succeed or fail. A successful grand strategy, he argues, must balance the theory of strategy (“Grammar”) and its application in real time to uncertainty (“Logic”).

If strategy, as Brands argues in his introductory essay, is “the indispensable art of getting what we want, with what we have, in a world that seems set on denying us,” then the essays continued in this new edition are of immeasurable importance for students, practitioners, and scholars alike (1). This new volume calls for a comprehensive renewal of our understanding of strategy because “[s]trategy is most valuable when the stakes are high and the consequences of failure are severe,” as they so clearly are today (2).

It is hard to overstate the importance of this book. The essays provide excellent starting points for research on almost any topic relevant to practitioners, and many of them will endure as the best summaries of thinking on their respective subjects until the next edition is published around 2065 or so. Until then, war college students would be well served to pick up this hefty tome for a mental workout. Reading the book cover to cover would be terrific preparation for a year at any American professional military education institution—or for service in Congress or the executive branch at a time when American strategy appears to be faltering.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023 • 1,200 pages • \$45.00

Keywords: World War II, Henri Jomini, irregular warfare, cyberspace, Carl von Clausewitz

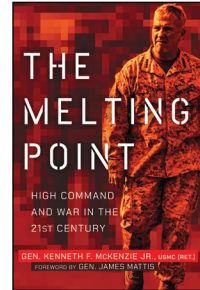
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The Melting Point: High Command and War in the 21st Century

by Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.

Reviewed by Dr. Thomas W. Spahr, De Serio Chair of Strategic Intelligence
and associate professor, US Army War College

After three grueling years as the commander of United States Central Command (CENTCOM) and 42 years of service, General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. refused to rest in his retirement. Instead, he wrote a valuable book for military professionals, Middle East scholars, and civil-military relations experts. McKenzie presents an honest, often critical, assessment of military and policy leaders, including himself. Unlike many post-career biographies that span entire careers—such as Stanley A. McChrystal’s *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (Portfolio, 2013) or James Mattis and Bing West’s *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (Penguin Random House, 2019)—or offer broad analysis on warfare—such as David Petraeus and Andrew Robert’s *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine* (Harper, 2023)—McKenzie focuses on his three years as CENTCOM commander. This tight focus creates space for details rarely available so close in time to the events he describes.



McKenzie makes three central arguments:

1. Recent accusations of a civil-military relations “crisis”—specifically, an overpowered military dictating to civilian authorities—are overblown, a point he supports with ample evidence.
2. Combatant commanders executing policy and directing military forces in conflict have a unique role. McKenzie compares the combatant commander to other four-star generals, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service Chiefs of Staff, who are not in the operational chain of command and do not bear moral responsibility for US servicemembers in combat.
3. Leadership matters, and combatant commanders’ decisions have profound effects on battlefields.

McKenzie describes in detail his interface with the chairman, the secretary of defense, and the president as he presented military options, orchestrated operations, and balanced risk surrounding events, including the raid that killed ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the strike that killed Iranian Quds Force leader Qassem Soleimani. He argues that Iran is the most important threat in the Middle East and defends the much-criticized Soleimani strike as justified and impactful on Iran's ability to orchestrate military operations. McKenzie highlights moments of civil-military disagreement and the frustrations of managing CENTCOM as successive presidential administrations shifted focus to the Indo-Pacific. He criticizes what he calls a strategic "system of expedients" versus "a cohesive, coherent whole, applied within an overarching concept" when allocating forces to the Middle East (102).

While McKenzie argues that Iran is the central problem in the Middle East, he dedicates nearly half the book (151 of 306 pages) to Afghanistan. I am glad he did, as his description is the best I have read of the strategic events that led to that dramatic end. McKenzie casts blame all around for the ultimate failure in Afghanistan: on the military, Department of State, and the executive branch. For the dramatic collapse, he blames the most recent and current presidential administrations for failing to enforce the terms of the Doha Agreement and places blame squarely on President Joe Biden's administration for the chaotic exit in August 2021. Specifically, the administration decided to reduce the military below his recommended cap of 2,500, permitting no more than 650 American troops, while maintaining an embassy with a significant presence of Americans and Afghan allies. This decision was naive to the type of enemy facing the United States—one determined to win a military victory, replace the government, and remove all Western influence. His convincing argument demonstrates military responsiveness to civilian orders, but it left me questioning if the military could have better prepared for the worst-case scenario that became a reality.

In his nuanced conclusion, McKenzie defends his central argument against what many academics have called "an ascendent Joint Staff that has tended . . . to mute or quiet civilian voices" (290). Each side has its place, and he is critical of officers who fail to understand that the military must ultimately yield to the political and the civilian. He is equally critical of politicians who, instead of executing their responsibility to manage the more difficult task of making policy, tend to "substitute tactical micromanagement for policy creation" (291). He claims that if the military seems overpowering, it is likely attributable to the experienced military planners building courses of action, versus often-inexperienced civilian politicians. This scenario was especially true at the end of the Trump administration, after Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper's firing, a period McKenzie refers to as "amateur hour" on the civilian side of the relationship (166).

McKenzie's valuable advice to future strategic military leaders should be required reading at senior levels of professional military education. Military advice matters because it is rooted in experience, judgment, and the practice of war. Politicians should not elevate it above other advice but should always listen and insist that military advice be unfiltered. Few would argue this point, yet trust has eroded between senior politicians and their military leaders. One hopes that books like McKenzie's will help future civilian and military leaders understand their role better.

Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press • 327 pages • \$34.95

Keywords: Afghanistan withdrawal, civil-military relations, military leadership, combatant commands, Middle East

The Making of a Leader: The Formative Years of George C. Marshall

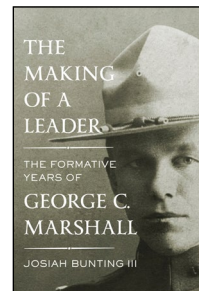
Josiah Bunting III

Reviewed by Reverend Dr. Wylie W. Johnson, chaplain (US Army, retired),
US Army War College class of 2010

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General George C. Marshall's amazing military career is perhaps one of the most documented livelihoods ever. Amazon currently lists well over 20 books about it in print. There is hardly a World War II book that does not mention Marshall. Add to this list countless articles about Marshall and the war that have been published over the past 70 years, not to mention those out of print, and the volume of writing on Marshall becomes staggering.

So why another book, especially one that only briefly covers the many assignments, achievements, and accolades of such a well-trodden subject? The obvious answer is to introduce new generations to the remarkable person, work, and leadership of this gifted soldier. The author, Josiah Bunting III—a Rhodes Scholar, a former enlisted marine and later an Army officer, and a graduate and former superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI)—retells the story of VMI's stellar alumnus.



This short biography describes an exceptional military leader who, despite his recognized ability and many efforts, never led troops in combat but always served as a staff officer. The hard truth is that most military leaders do not get to lead in combat or leave an indelible mark on their respective service. Marshall had a different military career than that which is usually lauded today. He set the example as a gifted planner, strategist, judge of leadership ability, and consummate military politician ultimately able to navigate at the highest levels of government. Remember, even at the very apex of his storied career, he served as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's primary staff officer.

At the turn of the twentieth century, America possessed a minuscule military penuriously funded, chronically short of equipment, suspicious of education, and plagued by a stultifying seniority system. At times, Congress even reduced the pay scale for all serving military personnel while making steep cuts in the overall service budgets. Army assignments often meant remote locations, rude accommodations, and small contingents of soldiers.

Promotions came excruciatingly slowly. Marshall graduated from VMI in 1901 but did not receive one of the few commissions reserved for schools other than the United States Military Academy until the following year. It would be five long years until his promotion to first lieutenant and 10 more before pinning on the captain insignia. During World War I, Marshall quickly rose through breveted ranks to colonel and was recommended for brigadier general. Immediately following the war, he returned to his permanent rank of captain. He would not see promotion to colonel again until 1933.

Marshall served at a time when junior officers found themselves as the senior authorities in remote outposts because ranking officers departed for months at a time. As a newly minted lieutenant in the Philippines, Marshall quickly learned leadership skills from seasoned noncommissioned officers and by necessity. Traveling to his first remote posting, Marshall and another lieutenant had to take command of a coastal ship during a storm when the terrified captain took refuge below decks! Officers dealt with more than discipline and military matters in such places. They confronted epidemics, enforced local laws, oversaw soldiers working as stevedores, led communities, and served as *patresfamilias*.

Bunting repeatedly observes that officers remained in the Army for recognitions other than promotions or pay. They shared a deep devotion to the military profession and honored each other for their abilities and

competence because rank reflected neither. Opportunities came infrequently, so soldiers had to be prepared. Marshall was ready, always striving to be the best. His ability, effort, and work caught the attention of a series of military mentors and patrons over the years, which resulted in significant assignments in places where he could lead. There are many lessons to be learned from Marshall's example. Today's military requires the same enduring mindset of professionalism and dedication to the calling.

Some benefits of military life for Marshall included ample time for martial arts and personal recreation. In many assignments, his wife could accompany him. Officers had privileges then that allowed extended leaves of absence to travel. When in remote overseas locations, even enlisted servicemembers could afford to hire servants and live well. The military life was not then, and is not now, all service and sacrifice. Today's high-tempo, high-stress Army could relearn some lessons about time for study and recreation.

Bunting's short biography is an easy read divided into 12 concise chapters moving through Marshall's many assignments. The book concludes by describing Marshall's years as the ranking General of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army during World War II. Wrapped in the life and times of George C. Marshall, this book is a well-written introduction to the art of leadership that senior leaders can recommend to rising junior officers. It may stimulate further reading and study on the pathfinders of our profession.

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Keywords: leadership, military biography, mentor, World War II, recreation

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